

40 years, do my colleagues not think we owe the common courtesy and decency to the taxpayers to get them the best price, not the premium price?

Today, Americans pay the most of any industrialized country for pharmaceutical products. Yet on each of the areas, market access and competition, bulk purchasing, or in generics, the conference took a punch. I understand why. I am not naive to politics. I understand who benefits.

There was an article in *The Washington Post* showing that the pharmaceutical industry would garner \$132 billion in additional revenue from this legislation, and who do my colleagues think is going to give that \$132 billion? Our parents, grandparents, and the taxpayers. That is the way the system works, but in each of these cases we could have done something to lower prices and make the needed medications more affordable and more accessible, and we chose not to.

That is why I am opposing this legislation. It does nothing to affect the price of prescription drugs that on average has gone up 15 to 20 percent a year as the cause of inflation. Prescription drugs are one of the single reasons for the rise of inflation in health care in general. We could do something to affect the prices of medications and we chose not to.

I think it is important to know, as somebody whose life was saved by types of medications, what the pharmaceutical industry does is very important. The research they do is very important. We Americans are the leaders in the world in new pharmaceutical research, and the reason is because the pharmaceutical industry here in the United States is the beneficiary of the generosity of the taxpayers. The research and development tax credit, all the research and development of new medications, life-saving medication is paid for by the taxpayers.

SUPPORT FOR THE CONFERENCE REPORT ON THE MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG AND MODERNIZATION ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight in support of the conference report for the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act. Tomorrow, this body is poised to pass historic legislation that will provide millions of seniors access to a responsible and affordable prescription drug benefit. Almost 40 years ago, a promise was made to seniors, a promise that they could depend on Medicare for affordable, reliable, and quality health care.

With passage of this conference report, we will achieve numerous goals that will strengthen the current Medicare program and will protect the most vulnerable seniors. Low-income seniors and those with extremely high pre-

scription drug costs are given specific consideration.

While at the same time bringing much-needed fiscal relief in the overall cost of prescription drugs to all seniors, by adding a voluntary prescription drug benefit and modernizing the program to give seniors more choice in their overall health plans, Congress has an opportunity to improve the quality of health care being provided in the Medicare program for millions of seniors.

As a Member that represents a rural district, I am also very pleased with many of the rural provider provisions contained in this report. Under this legislation, unequal payments for equal work will no longer be status quo for rural America's health care providers.

Hospitals are important to rural communities for three reasons. First and foremost, they provide health care services for the residents. Second, hospitals are an economic engine in rural communities, and in my district they are the first or second largest employer, providing good-paying jobs. Third, hospitals are an economic development tool. Without adequate access to health care, it is difficult for a community to retain and attract businesses. A strong health care system is vital to the strength and stability of any community.

I am also pleased that this conference report also contains a provision to establish health savings accounts. This will help not only seniors but all Americans to better afford their health care. Health savings accounts will allow individuals to save, grow and spend their hard-earned dollars tax free for necessary out-of-pocket medical expenses. These accounts will go a long way in helping to make health care more affordable for families and individuals of all ages.

Mr. Speaker, when I first ran for office 3 years ago, I committed myself to working toward adding a prescription drug benefit in Medicare. I am pleased to support this conference report which I believe will move Medicare into the 21st century, and I urge all my colleagues to do the same.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ROGERS of Alabama). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. WOOLSEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CASTRO SEEKS TO KILL PEACEFUL CUBAN DISSIDENT DR. OSCAR ELIAS BISCET

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I try to come to

this floor every week to highlight the existence of the individual cases of political prisoners on an island only 90 miles away from the United States, thousands of political prisoners, thousands upon thousands. Tonight, I speak of perhaps the most, or certainly one of the most respected of the political prisoners in the enslaved island of Cuba, Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet.

Dr. Biscet, prisoner of conscience, declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, is an extraordinary man. He maintains a philosophy of nonviolence, and yet his nonviolence has been responded to continuously by the violence of what is without any doubt a gangster regime run by the gangster in chief, the totalitarian tyrant of Cuba.

Now, Dr. Biscet was sentenced to 3 years in the Cuban gulag. He was sentenced in 1998 to 3 years in a Cuban gulag. When he was released last October, October of 2002, he was out of prison only a few weeks when he was rounded up again and sentenced this time for "association with enemies of the State," and he was sentenced, along with over 75 other peaceful dissidents and independent journalists, to 25 years in the Cuban gulag.

A few weeks ago, they told Dr. Biscet that he was going to be placed with a serial killer, someone who was a common criminal and who had murdered many, many people. He objected to that. As a consequence of his objection, Dr. Biscet has been placed in what is called the tomb. He is underground in solitary confinement, in a punishment cell. And so that he fully understood the dimension of his punishment, a serial killer was placed along with him in the tomb. So Dr. Biscet is at this moment in a tomb in the Cuban gulag because he believes in freedom and democracy, and he has espoused support for Mahatma Gandhi and for Martin Luther King and the peaceful methods to achieve the change that those great leaders represent.

The question I ask this evening, the one question which begs to be asked of our colleagues, is how can they come here time and time again to this floor and in the other House to ask for measures that would provide additional revenue to that dictatorship; some of them after having received one of the 8-hour or 10-hour banquets that the Cuban dictator likes to offer to his friends, they have come here and been zealous advocates for someone who they consider so charming, so admirable, so intelligent? In fact, one of our colleagues was so impressed with the Cuban tyrant when Castro told him that his shoes were dirty, that he should shine his shoes, that he melted in admiration before the charming tyrant, who has such interesting comments, this tyrant who maintains thousands of men and women in the gulag because of their support of men and women believing in freedom and democracy.

Another question is begged, Mr. Speaker: Where is the free press that